

with enough tweakability to see action in a number of different musical scenarios.

## TUBEHOLIC OVERDRIVE

Ogre's little alien head (\$219) offers the slick cockpit cover, four colors, and basic controls (Level, Tone, and Gain). Tone-wise, it's somewhat of an overdrive/distortion—gotta love the dual-purpose thing—that uncorks a really exciting and ferocious roar. Articulation is as good as the Thunderclap, although you get a little bit of a broader raunch factor here, as the Tubeholc can go from just a tad edgy to crunchy to blistering, depending on where you set the Gain knob. As a result, your attack and performance gestures are tracked somewhat more dynamically. This is a very versatile rumble machine.

## BOTTOM LINE

One might be tempted to think the Ogres are a slick gimmick. They aren't. The industrial design is awesome, of course, but the pedals *do* sound very good, and they can absolutely hold their own against some other delay, distortion, and overdrive boxes. As mentioned earlier, the only consideration is pricing. You can get good sounds for a bit less elsewhere, but you can only get these beautiful, artwork-quality casings from Ogre. And, hey, style has always been a big part of rock and roll, and I think it's pretty brilliant that Ogre made some good-sounding pedals and then dressed them up like rock stars. [ogreusa.com](http://ogreusa.com) —Michael Molenda

## VAUXFLORES

VauxFlores pedals are created by experimental composer, sound artist, and inventor Travis Johns, who states, "Conventional tools tend not to yield unconventional results." Well, Johns isn't going after the conventional. He admits straight out that his designs are focused on the underground.

"We're not looking for the brown, green, or blue sound, or the perfect approximation of a particular player's aesthetics," he says. "We have no desire to produce a compelling clone of the commonplace. What we are after is something just far enough off the beaten path to be sonically interesting, yet functionally useful—high quality, rugged, complex, and just a little raunchy at heart."

At present, Johns produces these pedals in small batches, and offers them for sale online through Etsy and Reverb. None of the pedals are battery powered, as the company is not down with the environmental impact of used 9-volters. You'll need a 9-volt power supply. Inside the casing, the hand-built pedals are wired simply and elegantly.

Although the sounds of these pedals are pretty arty and extreme, VauxFlores does a great job of informing buyers about exactly what they are in for by posting several SoundCloud audio examples for each model. In other words, you can't say you weren't warned. For our tests, we used a Gibson Les Paul through a 50-watt Marshall DSL 2000 set to its clean channel, and cranked up pretty

loud, as well as a Reverend Reeves Gabrels Signature Spacehawk through a Vox AC30.

## 23

When I first plugged into this pedal and nudged up the amp volume, the 23 (\$179 direct) started playing itself with a series of rhythmic gurgles, spritzes, buzzes, and gronks. It was a bit of a shock

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# Gear

## STOMPBOX FEVER

at first, but given that I knew I was in wacky performance-art land, I just enjoyed the impromptu concert. Controlling the 23 is often an expression of ego, rather than practical reality. You can adjust the Blend, Volume, Tone, and Feedback knobs, and perhaps even fool yourself into thinking you know what you are doing, but beware—the highly interactive controls have a mind of their own, and sound crafting is more an act of accepting what you are given than tweaking tones to your desires. None of this was a bummer—at least to me—and I thoroughly enjoyed all the surprises that the 23 delivered.

This is an extreme fuzz with a hint of an octave effect, and—well I can't say this better than the VauxFlores website—"heterodyned, atonal artifacts." What this means for creating music is that, um, you may have to reorient your definition of "music." I found the weird blastoid undulations to be marvelous for adding strange harmonic figures under chords, and, when deployed subtly on single-note lines, you can still discern enough of the melody to utilize the part as a front-and-center



VauxFlores 23

hook—that is, if the hook line was performed by tipsy alien lifeforms. Again, this is a very good thing. Everything the 23 does is abnormal, and everything you play through it will demand attention.

As a closing note, the 23's front-panel graphic was derived from Johns' *Bioprinting I* piece that used amplified earthworms to create the art. Here's where you say, "of course..."

### 24

The 24 (\$169 direct) is a high-gain, three-transistor fuzz with a good amount of tweaking options. It has knobs to control Voltage, Bias 1, Bias 2, Fuzz, and Volume, as well as a tone switch that lets you choose between a frequency spectrum best suited for guitar or one tailored for bass. The Voltage control determines the amount of spitting and sputtering, and the two Bias knobs let you dial in fuzz that ranges from mild to over-the-top grind. All controls are very interactive, and, believe it or not, experimenting with the knobs can also produce some very dynamic effects—it's not all about tortured buzz here. The level of tweakability makes the 24 a fabulous choice if you want to buy into the VauxFlores concept, but feel that you might not always want to deploy weird and feral snarls. Here, you can actually go "subtle" with your fuzz. Imagine that.

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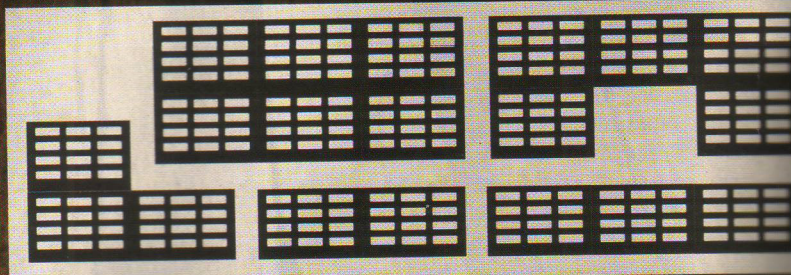
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# Gear

## STOMPBOX FEVER

VauxFlores 24



The only complaint I have with this pedal is the position of the on/off switch. It is too close to the knobs for Fuzz and Volume, which makes it difficult to stomp on the 24 in the heat of a performance and not have my boot either slip on the knobs or change their positions. An interesting note is that the 24's front-panel artwork is derived from data-bent imagery that included input sounds by the pedal itself—which means the 24 kind of generated its own art.

### GOLD STANDARD

Designed in collaboration with Baltimore-based composer, violist, and visual artist Liz Meredith, the Gold Standard (\$119 direct) is described as a "stripped down" version of the 24. It certainly has all the untamed sizzle that the 24 is capable of—and more—and flies the flag of its buzz-saw sound proudly. There is practically no option here for anything but madness. If you want a totally jacked-up tone, this is your altar. It spits

and it sputters and it sounds broken—although you can dial back the insanity to actually hear notes clearly if you start getting a bit timid. The Volume knob provides a significant increase in level (about 12dB)—which is helpful if you want the more extreme sounds of the Gold Standard to cut through a band mix—and, with everything set just right, you can get almost endless sustain. I don't say this lightly: Take care. This pedal may have the power to destroy the world.

### PLATANO VERDE

The Platano Verde (\$89 direct) is perhaps the most "normal" fuzz in the VauxFlores line. You just get a Tone and a Volume control, and the basic sound is brightly, buzzy, and fizzy. It's a good fit for psychedelic ramblings, industrial noises, and just any riff that you want to scream out of a mix with an intense and unconventional frazzle. Johns says he based the Platano Verde on schematics he found in Brazilian electronics magazines from the 1970s. Another factoid is that this is one of the VauxFlores pedals with artwork actually

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**VauxFlores Gold Standard**

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#### BOTTOM LINE

You definitely have to be into sonic terrorism to love



**VauxFlores Platano Verde**

the VauxFlores line, or, at least, be willing to explore the vast textural landscapes of your experimental side. There are few fuzz pedals like this anywhere, and I'd wager no companies are so fully committed to the ferocious bizarre and arcane. I have to salute

Travis Johns for that. The good thing is that these pedals are reasonably priced, so you're not paying a premium to celebrate your wild side. The sounds are so compelling and extreme that I'd have no problem saving a VauxFlores for just the right track, but that's just me. I found the pedals to be pretty tough, although the home-ground black finishes are a bit sloppy, and the artwork can get dinged up pretty easily. (Johns states that he is changing how the pedals are sealed to rectify this.) [vauxflores.com](http://vauxflores.com)

—Max Lazarus and Michael Molenda

## ZAIM AUDIO

Spoiler Alert: Mark Zaim is several galaxies distant from the VauxFlores concept. Zaim's goal appears to be getting his overdrive pedals to sound as natural and organic as a tube amp as possible. Nothing shocking or bizarre, and no pedals "playing themselves"—just warm grit and a stout punch. Well, with one exception. His Obscene Fuzz actually flies quite close to something VauxFlores' Travis Johns might dig. It just goes to show that



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